

Nadler Statement on Censure of Rep. Charles Rangel

Thursday, 02 December 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) spoke on the House floor regarding H.Res. 1737, In the matter of Representative Charles B. Rangel of New York. He voted to reprimand Rep. Rangel for breaking House rules, and in his statement explained why he believed censure was an excessive penalty that did not conform to previous House precedents.

The following is Nadler's floor statement, as prepared:

"Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss H. Res. 1737 and the circumstances surrounding the gentleman from New York, Representative Charlie Rangel.

"Like many Members of the House, I have long considered Charlie Rangel a friend. In fact, I have known Mr. Rangel since his first campaign for the House.

"Since his days as a true war hero who saved the lives of many of his fellow American soldiers in Korea, Charlie Rangel has dedicated his life to public service - as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, a member of the New York State Assembly, and, since 1970, as a Member of the House. He has always been a courageous, outspoken, and effective advocate for his district, for his beliefs, and for people who needed a voice. We all owe Charlie Rangel a great debt for a lifetime of public service.

"But, none of that is before us now. Before us now is a report from the House Ethics Committee finding that Mr. Rangel has violated the Rules of the House and that he be censured for that. I do not disagree that Mr. Rangel has violated the Rules of the House in serious ways. In his actions, Mr. Rangel showed carelessness, poor judgment, and a disregard for the Rules of the House. Some sanction is necessary and appropriate. Under the rules and precedents of the House, however, his conduct merits a reprimand and not a censure.

"The decision by the Ethics Committee to recommend censure was based, it said, on the 'cumulative nature of the violations' and because 'the eleven violations committed by Representative Rangel on a continuous and prolonged basis were more serious in character, meriting a strong Congressional response rebuking his behavior.'

"What this ignores, however, is that eight of the eleven separate counts all stemmed from just one mistake - Mr. Rangel's belief that certain advocacy for an educational institution in his district amounted to constituent service. And, while this belief may have been erroneous, it was borne out of a desire to help his constituents and not out of a desire for personal gain.

"Moreover, standards for proper punishment have been developed through past House precedent. Censure is reserved for true corruption, improper personal financial gain, or sexual misconduct. None of that is present here.

"The Staff Director and Chief Counsel of Ethics Committee said that he saw 'no evidence of corruption.' Further, he admitted that he did not believe Mr. Rangel was trying to 'enrich himself.' What happened, according to the Chief Counsel, was that Mr. Rangel was 'overzealous' in his advocacy and 'sloppy' in his financial dealings. Neither overzealousness nor sloppiness merit censure.

"The nature of the violations and the precedents of the House show that reprimand, not censure, is the appropriate action for the House. While not as severe as censure, reprimand is a serious punishment. If passed in this case it would reflect the collective judgment of the entire House that the conduct of Mr. Rangel was wrong and deserves sanction.

"I ask my colleagues to carefully consider all of the evidence in the record in deciding how to proceed today. I know deciding on punishment for a colleague and friend is not comfortable or easy. But, we owe it to Mr. Rangel and this institution to make our decision in a careful and considered manner. I hope that our debate and whatever decision is made reflect credibly on the House."

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